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ABSTRACT

Evolving from experiences in a graduate seminar that led to new understandings of feminist pedagogy, this theory of feminist pedagogy in action rests on four phenomena that are each necessary but none sufficient. After describing the creation of a learning community as well as a search of educative research, a delineation of the four phenomena is outlined. Feminist pedagogy occurs at the juncture of: (1) a reinventing of power relationships that emancipate teachers, learners, and the subject investigated; (2) a context where community, conversation, and connected knowing flourish; (3) an understanding of knowing as partial and incomplete; and (4) moral leadership by teachers and learners. A 23-item bibliography presents works read by a majority of the seminar participants. (CK)

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RESEARCHING PEDAGOGY: A TRANSFORMATIVE, FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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PATHS TO INQUIRY THROUGH NARRATIVE AND DIALOGUE:
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RESEARCHING PEDAGOGY: A TRANSFORMATIVE, FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE
"Education is the process of waking up to life"

Many of the papers for the symposium, including this one, grew out of a suggestion to investigate and write about our "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990) of the graduate seminar. Reluctant to end the conversation at the end of the course and desirous that our collaborations extend outward to engage other educators, we sought new forums where we could continue the dialogue.

I still have pangs of discomfort when I hear the response to my presence and actions among the seminar group. My reaction in the first seminar was to discount any special contribution from me: "This is a unique group; these students are so strong that they are carrying the class; after all, it was a former student who suggested that we read Composing a Life (Bateson, 1990); I really lined up some good panels and speakers" were my unspoken thoughts. When students came back and said, "We want another course with you," I was flattered and readily took the nudge to lay out a context that would focus on narrative, a topic of interest to me, one that I was grappling with as a researcher, teacher, and ever-evolving person. As a result of reflection and analysis of the lived experience of the seminar, I have come to understand ways of teaching and learning and being in the world. This educative research process has challenged my beliefs about myself as an educator and led to deepened understandings of feminist pedagogy.

Creating a Learning Community

My purpose in facilitating the seminar was to create the opportunity for a group-directed learning experience through an interdisciplinary consideration of narrative perspectives and gendered knowing. Everyone came to the class by choice, including a lone male member new to the group, who later transferred to a different department

and elected not to participate in the AERA symposium. Though each participant, including myself, had a general expectation to read outside class, write and contribute to the seminar sessions, there were no formal course assignments at the onset. Rather the content, readings, and path of the seminar unfolded from week to week and continues its evolution in bi-weekly meetings for dialoguing, writing, and revising our work. We had one core text, Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education (Witherell & Noddings, 1991) and an extensive bibliography of books and articles recommended by others or me that we hoped would illuminate narrative in relation to four dimensions: epistemology, self, pedagogy, and research.

Seminar sessions consisted of sharing narratives, presenting information researched by individuals in the group and engaging in dialogue loosely structured around participant-generated questions, such as:

1. What is narrative? How do feminist epistemologies inform narrative? Is narrative gendered?
2. What is self? How do we come to know ourselves and build moral communities with others?
3. How do theories of curriculum inform narrative? What is the role of narrative and dialogue in teaching and learning?
4. Does narrative have a place in research? Is it scholarly?

Not only was I deeply interested in the questions we would pursue, but I also relished the opportunity to continue my self-reflective journey as a teacher/learner/researcher with a group of students for whom I had deep respect and admiration. I had little inkling that this seminar would bring me full circle to feminist theory and pedagogy, the umbrella for this symposium. Though I had researched, taught, and written about issues in feminist education for over a decade in the early stages of women's movement, this seminar on narrative the summer of 1992, almost 20

years later, provided the truest opportunity to date for my experiencing feminist pedagogy, albeit in a context that was not explicitly feminist.

A Search for Educative Research

When we submitted our proposal for this symposium, I had an image of my role as the one responsible to make the bridge from the lived experience of the group to feminist theory. Immersed in a spectrum of feminist theories and interpretations (Flax, 1987; Harding, 1991; Lather, 1991; Martin, 1984; Noddings, 1992), I found my task becoming more and more problematic. Recent critiques of critical pedagogy, often linked with feminist perspectives, illustrate the contradictions inherent in any theory which subscibes to an ideology yet also purports to be emancipatory (Ellsworth, 1988; Lather, 1991). Hence I have been reluctant to embrace any theoretical camp, even feminist/otherist theories, though they come closest to my experiences and "standpoint" in life. And by naming feminist theories in the plural, I recognize the multiple and conflicting realities inherent in the diverse interpretations of feminism.

At the core of the seminar on narrative was an exploration of the role of theory, as a way of making sense of experience and of communicating with others. We reconstructed theory through inquiry and dialogue to make it meaningful in the context of narrative, self, and pedaogy. Theory was valued as a frame to "hold things together," some way to keep chaos and anarchy from swamping the mind while also maintaining the flexibility to consider new frames, new ways of ordering the complexities of embodied experience.

Our work is presented in the spirit of emancipatory research whereby researchers can take risks and experience different ways of researching (Lather, 1991). This has resulted from a considerable struggle to find a voice that does not separate the researcher from researching, theory from practice, a way to make research educative (Gitlin, 1990). Central to this project is the dialogical process that has occurred over the last year between myself as teacher/researcher and students as learners/researchers

whose voices are not only heard but shape the teaching/learning/researching process. Spurred by the insights and transformations of others in the group as well as my own, I have taken courage to speak trusting that this search for meaningful research will resonate with other university teachers and researchers.

What I aim to do in this paper is to illuminate how my tacit understanding of feminist pedagogy informed the experiences of the seminar and how the seminar experience led to new understandings of feminist pedagogy. I do this through an investigation drawn from my reflections, readings, seminar conversations, dialogue journal writing with another class member, and participants' writings produced from fall, 1991 to the present. This method is inductive, whereby I generate themes analytically from reoccurring instances in the evidence and construct four assertions that capture the essence of feminist pedagogy-in-action (Strauss, 1989).

What follows is an effort to give clarity to my lived experience and responsiveness to others' experience of the seminar through personal theory building (Ross, Cornett, & McCutchen, 1992) about feminist pedagogy, the "essence" of feminist education. I have forged an understanding of feminist pedagogy-in-action that rests on four phenomena, each necessary but none sufficient. Feminist pedagogy occurred at the junction of (1) a reinventing of power relationships that were emancipating to teacher, learners, and subject investigated; (2) a context where community, conversation, and connected knowing flourished; (3) an understanding of knowledge as partial and incomplete; and (4) moral leadership by teacher and learners.

I. REINVENTING OF POWER RELATIONSHIPS: EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY

In our work presented here, we describe the new knowledge, dialogue, collaborative action and risk-taking that resulted from a community where trust of others, commitment to learning, and respect for differences thrived (McEwan, 1993; Greene, 1993; Robinson, 1993; Gregg, 1993; Orapollo, 1993). These transformations were

accompanied by a redefining and reinventing relationships of power, central to an emancipatory pedagogy-in-action (Freire, 1971). The re-positioning of authority occurred across and within a number of kinds of relationships: among the students, their relationships with me and mine to each of them, our relationship as a group, our relationship to the subject of narrative, and our relationships to ourselves. This reinventing occurred in a way that the traditional authority of disembodied knowledge and teacher prerogative was interrupted. It was replaced by a spirit of open inquiry and loose equality nurtured by both the care and questioning afforded ideas, students, and teacher alike, a scenario that resonant with descriptions of feminist pedagogy (See, for example, Musil, 1992a; Shrewsbury, 1987; Belenky, et.al., 1986).

One of the hallmarks of feminist scholarship is opening up inquiry to topics heretofore taboo or considered insignificant by masculinist perspectives. Through active questioning of self, others, and text, we also considered and critiqued the processes of constructing and communicating knowledge, ever seeking new data, new interpretations, and new theories (Maher, 1985a). For women, people of color, and others who are outside of white, heterosexual male hegemony, and who are traditionally silenced by both society and the social structures of schools and universities, to find "the courage to question" (Musil, 1992a) existing knowledge and social relationships requires a pedagogy that transforms individuals as well as interrupts taken-for-granted hierarchical relationships (See Noddings review, 1992).

Such an dialogical inquiry process where the end point is not predictable required a conscious effort on my part. Entering the seminar meeting room, most days I had a sense of panic that I was not prepared because I really didn't know how the seminar session would begin, develop, or end. I would have to remind myself I could handle whatever came up; by not being so quick to take charge, impose my views, or dispense knowledge, I would open up space for others to do so. By only occassionally asking questions or commenting, ~~my voice did not lose its significance~~ I, allowed myself

the space to really listen and reflect on the relationships others brought to the fore, and led to my being an active participant in the construction of knowledge.

Contradictions inherent in the application of an emancipatory pedagogy emerged as well. What effect would this "empowerment" have on the lives of my students in academia outside the seminar door? Would their work be taken seriously? Or would their expectations to have a voice be threatening to the established academic hierarchies, maintained by male and females alike? As a feminist educator, I also asked myself, had I done enough to point the way to investigating the relationships of gender to our topic and the seminar experience? From my understanding of feminist pedagogy and the lived experience of the group, there was no question that our process was feminist in that it was self-reflective, intersubjective, and reciprocal (National Women's Studies Association, 1991) and our knowledge "connected knowing" (Belenky, et.al., 1986). But others in the group questioned the idea that there was anything "feminist" about our topic, narrative inquiry, and remain uncomfortable with the concept of feminism, much maligned and ballyhooed in the popular culture. Because of the predominate sense of the group that an exploration of feminist theory would be irrelevant or too controversial to deal with and my reluctance to convince the group otherwise, feminism and feminist theory never received full scrutiny during the seminar though concerns about women were raised periodically.

At the heart of my work as a feminist educator is an unwillingness to impose a feminist "truth" or judgment on others but rather to keep the dialogue open through a validation of others' realities, however contrary to mine, in order that we may find viable ways of being in the world (Wear, 1991). This de-emphasis of feminist theory could be seen as a failure of feminist pedagogy as I might once have asserted. Instead, one hallmark of feminist pedagogy, empowering learners, occurred by my pedagogy-in-action decision not to enlarge our focus to include an explicitly feminist analysis of theory and narrative.

What the experience of this seminar brought to light was that re-arranging power relationships within a learning context had an emancipatory impact for all, as both teacher and learners could explore new relationships in the pursuit of understanding. In addition, as a result of the questions raised by the group last summer and my interest in the terrain of feminist theory unexplored, I anticipate offering a new seminar around an investigation of gender issues in pedagogy, theory, and research for the upcoming summer.

II. COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION AND CONSTRUCTED KNOWING

The theme of community, conversation, and connected knowing is one of the most widely discussed aspect of feminist pedagogy (Belenky, et.al., 1986; Culley & Portuges, 1985; Hollingsworth, 1992; Musil, 1992a; Noddings, 1992; Steiner & Canter, 1991; Shrewsbury, 1987). As is evident in the previous papers, this theme pervaded the experience of most group members. As a result of the relationships and connections forged in the seminar context, we had many opportunities to construct knowledge in dialogical ways that was more conversational than adversarial. Growth was possible because through dialogue, with oneself or another or text, a person can change or change another (Brody & Witherell, 1991).

Informed by the many voices in the literature we read and fueled by the energy of our own voices, our conversation became a vehicle for understanding ourselves, understanding narrative, understanding pedagogy (see Musil, 1992b). Through connected teaching (Belenky et. al, 1986), I also revealed my process of contructing knowledge by becoming one of the community, sharing conversation, sharing self.

III. PEDAGOGY OF THE UNKNOWN AND UNKNOWABLE

In this symposium we have heard testament to the power of narrative, autobiography and conscious-raising in transforming learners. My next assertion restrains this

enthusiasm by suggesting the problematic nature of knowing, a recognition that the only truths we have are "partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others" (Ellsworth, 1988) necessitating a pedagogy that legitimizes "not knowing" as a way of knowing.

What do I mean by this? The paradox of knowing is that we can never find truth; if we think we have found truth, we stop knowing. How could this be so? Because "truth" derives its meaning from a context that is only partial, a "lens" through which meaning is illuminated and a knower who can never be completed disinterested or objective (Pagano, 1991).

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on this paradox, I wish to highlight the possibility of unauthentic knowing or false consciousness under the guise of emancipation. One can imagine a classroom where theories of critical pedagogy hold sway but "it's business as usual" with students parroting theories of emancipation and talking the language of empowerment rather than questioning these theories, holding them up to the lens of experience, and analyzing whose interests these theories serve (Ellsworth, 1988). The "expert/academician/researcher" as well as the feminist educator (See Ellsworth, 1988; Lather, 1991) are especially subject to this pitfall.

Because we altered the taken-for-granted power relationships of teacher, student, and knowledge , the stage was set for our coming to know about the unknowable and unknown, though less evident than other themes. Much of what fueled my active search for understanding in the seminar was a acknowledgement of the limitations of my education, both in and out of formal educational settings, and the willingness not only to expose my not knowing to others but to wrestle publicly with the paradox of uncovering truth. Because my doctoral studies had emphasized empirical, positivistic methods of knowing, I have been examining the transition I am undergoing to develop qualitative lenses for researching educational through a reflective process and active investigation of my teaching (reported in an earlier paper, Scott, 1991). What could

have been seen as my vulnerability or weakness was communicated in a context of respect for and probing of differences. Students witnessed my "not knowing" and my socially constructing knowledge through the dynamics of the seminar process.

IV. FEMINIST PEDAGOGY AS MORAL LEADERSHIP

The opportunity to engage over time with a community of committed learners has been a transformative experience for me as a learn er and as a leader. Over the years I have stuggled with the separations which divide my life, balancing my responsibilities as a teacher, scholar, parent, administrator, and feminist living in an unjust world, searching for an overarching purpose for my life, searching for wholeness. Like others my life is a journey which keeps finding new roads and exploring many side streets.

When I first met this group as new doctoral students in fall of 1991, my purpose for our being together was not just to introduce them to the world of academia but to provide a forum where we could begin to look at the problematic nature of academia and the conflicting demands of teacher educators serving many "masters," split between academia and the world of schools, between our public lives and our private selves.

My professional commitment has been first and foremost to the program of Elementary Education at the University, a program peopled by mostly female students, female teaching assistants, and female professors, preparing professionals that serve children, both female and male, who are increasingly diverse, poor, and at-risk of finding success in school or society. Though far from a beleaguered lot, we struggle daily to bring respect, respectability, and a resources to a large program which has its place right at the botton of the academic hierarchy. I have placed my energies in this endeavor working with other faculty and teacher education programs in the department to promote excellence and equity as well as foster a common sense of purpose and meaning to our work, despite the difficult circumstances.

Since becoming a department head two years ago, I have thought a lot about

leadership and the need to transform every learner, every teacher to see themselves as leaders, individuals who can act so that their lives can make a difference in the lives of others. I have struggled with the contradictions inherent in my status as a white, heterosexual, female full professor who has not acted to offer an explicitly feminist or women's studies courses for over a decade. The demands of required certification courses, paucity of students in the department who expressed an interest in gender issues, and public attention to the changing women's roles world have held me back. In reexamining my feminist teaching materials for K-12 schools last year, however, I realized these materials are as relevant today as 20 years ago and resolved to find a way to be more explicit in bringing these concerns to my professional life. But I also realized that we need new ways of reaching young women and men today who may take for granted the gains of past generations.

Feminist pedagogy as moral leadership suggests what we do as educators is reflected in how we live our lives. I'd like to think that my own search for authenticity and willingness to make this search public has had an impact on others (Grumet, 1990). I'd like to think that what comes next for these students and myself will bring clarity and enrich others. I know that my journey has only begun. My education continues as a process of waking up to life, ever changing, full of surprises and contradictions.

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